

FITNESS

Four Elements of Fitness Training

Whether you're an exercise novice taking the first steps toward fitness or a committed fitness fanatic hoping to optimize your results, a well-rounded fitness training program is essential. Base your exercise goals on the four primary elements of fitness.

Aerobic Fitness

Aerobic exercise is the cornerstone of most fitness training programs. Aerobic exercise causes you to breathe faster and more deeply, which maximizes the amount of oxygen in your blood. The better your aerobic fitness, the more efficiently your heart, lungs and blood vessels transport oxygen throughout your body and the easier it is to complete routine physical tasks and rise to unexpected challenges, such as running to your car in the pouring rain. Try walking, jogging, biking, swimming, dancing, water aerobics — even gardening and housework. Aim for at least 30 to 60 minutes of aerobic exercise most days of the week, even if you need to break it into 10-minute spurts of activity.

Muscular Fitness

Muscular fitness is another key component of a fitness training program. Regular strength training can help you reduce your body fat, increase your lean muscle mass and burn calories more efficiently. Building muscle also protects your joints from injury and boosts your stamina. It might even help you get a better night's sleep. Hand-held weights or homemade weights such as plastic soft drink bottles filled with water or sand may work just as well. Resistance bands are another inexpensive option. Your own body weight counts, too. Try push-ups, abdominal crunches and leg squats.

Stretching

Most aerobic and strength training activities cause your muscles to contract and flex. For balance in your fitness training program, it's important to stretch your muscles. Stretching increases your flexibility, improves the range of motion of your joints, and promotes better posture and circulation. Activities such as yoga and tai chi promote flexibility, too.

Core Stability

The muscles in your abdomen, lower back and pelvis, known as your core muscles, support balance and stability. Strengthening your core muscles improves posture and stability. Abdominal crunches are a classic core exercise. You can also try tai chi, or do various core exercises with a fitness ball. Sitting on the ball with good posture is a good start.

